b) determining if said patient is predisposed to develop severe disease based on said information and the presence or absence of a polymorphism in an HLA-DRB1 allele in said patient.

49. The method of claim 48, wherein said frequency of $CD4^+/CD28^{null}$ cells comprises the percent of $CD4^+$ cells that are CD28 negative.

50. The method of claim 48, wherein said reference frequency is derived from the $CD4^+/CD28^{null}$ cell frequency from a population.

51. The method of claim 50, wherein said population comprises a population of patients having a diffuse rheumatoid arthritis condition.

52. The method of claim 50, wherein said population comprises a population of patients having a follicular rheumatoid arthritis condition.

53. The method of claim 50, wherein said population comprises a population of patients having a granulomatous rheumatoid arthritis condition.

54. The method of claim 50, wherein said population comprises a population of healthy individuals.

55. The method of claim 50, wherein said population comprises a population of patients having subcutaneous nodules.

56. The method of claim 50, wherein said population comprises a population of patients having extra-articular involvement.

57. The method of claim 50, wherein said population comprises a population of patients having major joint destruction.

58. The method of claim 48, wherein said polymorphism comprises an HLA-DRB1 allele that encodes a polypeptide having an uncharged amino acid at position 74.

59. The method of claim 48, wherein said polymorphism comprises an HLA-DRB1 allele that encodes a polypeptide free from negatively charged amino acids at positions 70 and 71.

60. A method for determining the predisposition of a rheumatoid arthritis patient to develop severe disease, said method comprising:

a) determining the frequency of $CD4^+/CD28^{null}$ cells in said patient,

b) determining the presence or absence of a polymorphism in an HLA-DRB1 allele in said patient,

c) comparing said frequency of $CD4^+/CD28^{null}$ cells to a reference frequency to obtain information about said rheumatoid arthritis condition, and

d) determining if said patient is predisposed to develop severe disease based on said information and said presence or absence of said polymorphism.

61. A kit for determining the predisposition of a rheumatoid arthritis patient to develop severe disease, said kit comprising:

a) a first binding pair member, wherein said first binding pair member has specific binding affinity for a $CD4^+/CD28^{null}$ cell marker such that the frequency of $CD4^+/CD28^{null}$ cells in said patient is determinable, and

b) an oligonucleotide primer, wherein said oligonucleotide primer has specific binding affinity for at least a portion of the locus containing an HLA-DRB1 allele such that the a polymorphism of said HLA-DRB1 allele in said patient is determinable.

62. The kit of claim 61, wherein said kit comprises a reference chart, wherein said reference chart contains information about $CD4^+/CD28^{null}$ cell frequencies such that said predisposition is determinable based on said frequency of $CD4^+/CD28^{null}$ cells in said patient and said polymorphism of said HLA-DRB1 allele.--